

UNCLASSIFIED

STATEMENT BY

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL H STEVEN BLUM
CHIEF, NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
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**ON
RESPONDING TO CATASTROPHIC EVENTS: THE ROLE OF THE
MILITARY AND NATIONAL GUARD IN DISASTER RESPONSE**

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Chairman Davis, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the National Guard, its role in supporting responses to overseas and domestic missions, and the requirements associated with those missions.

Today, the National Guard finds itself more than ever linked to the vital interests of our nation, both here at home and around the world. Over 140,000 Guard soldiers are currently deployed in support of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and dozens of other nations. At the same time, the men and women on the Guard have responded magnificently to the catastrophic events of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita here at home. Over 50,000 National Guard personnel hailing from every state and territory have responded to calls for support during this difficult period. The efforts of these Guard soldiers and airmen are a source of tremendous pride to those of us in uniform as well as citizens throughout the nation.

As our government begins the vitally necessary process of assessing the effects of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita and the response to those events, the picture is one of laudable successes as well as areas requiring improvement.

I am particularly proud of the timeliness and magnitude of our efforts in advance of Hurricane Katrina and in our response in its immediate aftermath. Guard forces were in the water and on the streets of New Orleans rescuing people within four hours of

Katrina's passing. More than 6,500 Guard soldiers and airmen were in New Orleans alone by the second of September. The Guard deployed over 30,000 additional troops within 96 hours of the passing of the storm. As I noted earlier, we eventually saw over 50,000 Guard men and women deployed to the region. More than 22,000 Guard personnel remain on active duty in Louisiana alone, with over 31,000 total personnel in the five affected states. In short, the National Guard response to the catastrophic events of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita has been and continues to be both timely and extensive.

While I am extraordinarily proud of our efforts in responding to Katrina and Rita, room exists for improvement. Current resource levels for Combat Support and Combat Service Support equipment permit a response to domestic contingencies that falls short of our objectives in meeting the challenges of similar mission requirements. We are currently working with the Department of Defense and the Congress to better define our requirements in this area, with a view toward enhancing our capabilities in the future.

While the events of the past weeks and months have stressed the Guard and its capabilities, we are not broken. The Guard will continue to meet its requirements, both domestically and overseas, as an integral part of the Joint Force. The Guard has risen effectively to the challenges of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Katrina, Rita and countless other domestic and overseas mission requirements during the course of the past several years, and we will continue to meet any and all challenges in the future.

While we have been successful in meeting the needs of the warfighter overseas, there exists room for improvement in our capability to respond effectively to domestic mission requirements. As noted in the draft GAO report “*Reserve Forces: Plans Needed to Improve Army National Guard Equipment Readiness and Better Integrate Guard into Army Force Transformation Initiatives*”, resourcing Guard units deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom has reduced the equipment inventory of in the Guard’s non-deploying units¹. We have made every effort to ensure that our deploying units are fully equipped and ready to support operations anywhere in the world. To date, as the GAO report notes, we have transferred over 101,000 items of equipment in support of these missions. The report also notes, correctly, that these efforts have resulted in the reduced numbers of many critical equipment items, including night vision equipment, trucks and radios².

Support for National Guard equipment needs has been significant and timely. Resources earmarked in current legislation will allow the National Guard to take its first steps on the road to recovery. Nonetheless, the road to full recovery will be long and will require an order of magnitude increase in resourcing relative to that seen today. Working with the Department of Defense and the Congress, I firmly believe that we can meet this important challenge.

¹ GAO, Report to the Chairman, Committee on Government Reform, and the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, House of Representatives; *Reserve Forces: Plans Needed to Improve Army National Guard Equipment Readiness and Better Integrate Guard into Army Force Transformation Initiatives*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office, October 2005.

² Ibid.

Meeting the equipping needs of the National Guard in future years requires a closer working relationship with our Active Component Military partners than ever before. The Guard can only succeed in meeting these challenges its faces by working hand in hand with the Active Component Army and Air Force in identifying requirements and developing workable plans designed to attain these goals. I am pleased to note that the Guard's working relationship with these services has been extremely constructive and continues to improve.

One of the critical challenges facing the National Guard and the Army involves the implementation of the Army Modular Force initiative. The Guard fully supports this process, which will result in a more flexible, effective and deployable force than ever before. The Guard is fully integrated into the Modular Brigade fielding process, which will move the Guard and the Army closer than ever toward the shared vision of a truly seamless, joint force.

Meeting the ambitious challenges presented by the Modular Force initiative will only be possible with the active support of the Congress and the Department of Defense. To that end I endorse the recommendation in the GAO report, which specifies that the Secretary of the Army develop and submit to Congress a plan for the effective integration of the Army National Guard into its rotational force model and modular force initiatives³.

³ GAO Report: *Reserve Forces: Plans Needed to Improve Army National Guard Equipment Readiness and Better Integrate Guard into Army Force Transformation Initiatives*, p.26.

Events in the wake of 9/11, both here at home and abroad, have stressed this nation's armed forces to an extent rarely witnessed in the modern history of this nation. As a full member of the national security team, the National Guard has given its unstinting support in meeting these challenges both here at home and abroad. While the Guard has been successful in meeting these mission requirements, additional support will be vital to ensure we are effectively postured to meet the needs of the future. Working closely with the Department of Defense and the Congress, I am fully confident that we will continue to provide the outstanding support that our nation and its leadership have come to expect.

Thank you.